THE TIDE OF LIFE

AND OTHER POEMS

by

WATSON KIRKCONNELL

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and Other Poems

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Watson Kirkconnell

ARISTON
PUBLISHERS LIMITED
OTTAWA · CANADA

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By Ariston Publishers, Ltd.
Ottawa, Ont.

Printed in Canada

PS 8521. I743T5

TO MY CHILDREN

14284

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THE TIDE OF LIFE

Ah, Flood of Life on which I am a wave,
A feeble wave that soon must sink to rest,
Take now the fleeting tribute of my verse,
And as my drops disperse
Leaving no remnant of my foaming crest,
Let thy strong impulse in me be exprest
In vaster billows that go surging on.
For thou hast flowed here from an ageless deep
And shalt go forward to a deep unguessed,
And though my leaping surf shall soon be gone
And the cold currents shall no longer keep
My brief vibration in their endless quest,
Yet would I feel that somewhere down that sweep
Of mighty tides I still am manifest.

Where some dim veil of streaming star-dust lay
Across the vastness of Night's nakedness,
From the slow quickening of Time's caress
There woke beneath the dull maternal play
Of cold-pulsed ebbing eons in the dark
The throbbing of a spark
Of life engendered, of a power to stay
The elemental drift of empty force
And shape the chaos to a cosmic course.
Thus in the vast abyss of pregnant murk
An immanence at work
Wrought star and planet and the ambient earth
Jagged with cataclysmic mountain whence
Flowed down the dust of crescent continents.
Here was the protean life-force brought to birth;
Here that great pulse, begotten in the void
And never since destroyed,
Appeared parturient in the viscid spume
And clotted ooze of ancient mere and fen.
Lo, I was present then!—
For this hot blood that I give body-room,

This eager will incarnate in my brain,
Own their unbroken birthright back through all
The myriad issue of that ancient strain
Spanning the age-flux of the interval;
Thus with the waxing of longeval time
Grew worms of wandering slime,
Rough massy molluscs, fish with pulsant fin,
And those vast lizards of rock-furrowed skin
That churned hot tropic leagues of slushy mire
In wallowing battles for supremacy;
Up soared the race of birds with hearts of fire;
And subtle above all in land and sea,
Far mightiest in brain and craftiness,
Came those milk-breasted beasts that bear their young;
Till, from these creatures sprung,
Shaped by that primal procreative stress
Through all the long ascent that lay behind,
Arose a regent fit for sentient rule,
Emergent man, who vaguely held enshrined
Within his simian shagginess of skull
The crowning wonder of the conscious mind.

In shadowy recesses of my brain
Lurks many a spectral impulse of the past,
Crepuscular emotions that have lain
So shrouded that the conscience stares aghast;
Yet in these faded promptings I can find
The record of long ages of ascent
And see the steps up which my fathers went,
The matin education of my kind.
Slowly low panic fear forsook the brave;
Slowly the savage sought the common good;
Till the brute bloodlust of the jungle cave
Flowered to patience, love and fortitude.
Then from gaunt hunters of the flying game
Arose the bold to tame

The uddered wildlings by resource and stealth;
Then came the wise to sow and reap again,
And with the patient garnering of wealth
Grew cities with their walls of brick and stone,
Vast pyramid and sphinx and pillared fane
And emperors upon a jewelled throne.
Not less the increasing mind found liberty
From dreads of vaguely felt maleficence
In evil gods that called for reverence;
And Semites bent the knee
To One who asked but love and purity.
So too the intellect of daring Greece
Ranging the stellar height and moral deep
Found for the sorrowed soul a rule of peace
In temperance and measure and the steep
Marmoreal path up beauty's holy hill.
Thus in a world where still
Each element must yield to death and night
And all that breathes must rot in the abyss,
The stream of life had wrought in time's despite
This wonder that time's murder would dismiss.
Values of loveliness and love and faith,
Values of laughter, comradeship and jest—
These are the glories of the rainbow wraith
Painted by man across a darkening west.

Hail, puissant and holy, tyrant Love,
Inexorable master of mankind!
Though oft thy rule is blind
And wastes our peace and substance far above
All other authors of calamity,
Yet is thy reign a benediction too,
A consecrating grace whose high decree
Can stir our spirits to the pure and true.
Thou canst destroy us with the thunder's might,
Yet art a healing source of power and light.

Through thee the ancient life-tide surges on
With the resistless roll of a shoreless deep,
Clamoring through every lover's orison,
Keeping its vigil in a bride's fain eyes,
And from the fevered joys of nuptial sleep
Reaping the fruit of passioned urgencies.
All nature owns thy sway; by wood and field,
River and ocean, valley, plain and hill,
When ends the winter's chill,
The myriad tribes of beasts to passion yield,
The fishes and the birds obey thy power,
And even silent flower yearns for flower.
I too have borne thy yoke without complaining;
I too have felt thy ardors flame in me;
So for the vehemence of thy constraining
And all thy sweet and bitter ecstasy
Take now my gifts, and cease not from thy reigning!

I searched the centuries to read my race,
To learn the ancestral lines from which I came,
And in six generations scanty space
Proved how the pride of the Castilian dame,
The fervor of the Cambrian mountaineer,
The Teuton's strength austere,
The black breed of the Highlands, and the grey
Virility of Viking Cumberland
Had dowered with diversifying hand
My patronymic blood of Galloway.
More the receding record did now show.
There the great scroll was torn. But who can doubt
That these men, man-begot, themselves must owe
Their lineage to larger sources still,
Fountains past finding out;
And so the precedents that I fulfil
Flow from a misty maze of mountain slopes
To stir me with their ancient hates and hopes.

These five-score years their elements have lain
In the alembic of this newer land,
But still their potencies of mood remain
To mould emotion by their mute command:
I chant the clanging lines of Calderon
And my great granddam thrills in me once more;
I read old Celtic songs that sob and soar,
And Brythons long since gone
Beckon in joy through a half-opened door;
The simple sweetness of a German hymn
Grips like the glimpse of a forgotten home;
The harsh Norse epic conjures up a dim
Grey northern sea on which I used to roam.
Not less in daily act they live again,
These bygone sires that mingle in my blood,
Taste of my daily food,
Walk when I walk, debate within my brain,
And fall with me asleep until it seems
My own life is the fabric of their dreams.
And I am glad to feel myself no dull
Unsired, insipid soul some heaven contrives
But a creation far more wonderful—
The sentient focus where a myriad lives
Exult the night of centuries to annul.

Accept my grateful thanks, O mother-heart
And father-love by whom I was begot,
Who formed me as your conscious counterpart
That your mortality might perish not!
Yours is the fashion of my face and form,
Yours are the pulses warm
That play their fantasies along my veins
And urge me on to life's experience
With all that seeks and conquers and attains—
These are the bounty of your love prepense.
Not less I thank you for the nurturing hand

That my behaviour planned,
Teaching my boyish heart to know the true,
To shun all habit of the baser sort,
And seek the sanctities of good report.
The passing years increase my debt to you,
For memories of your mutual tenderness
Still live to touch and bless
My own attempts to raise the vestal flame
Upon my own hearth-stone; to woo and mate
And breed new scions of an honoured name;
For I would your great love perpetuate
In living monuments of lasting fame.

O thou whose eyes are pools of liquid blue
Touched with the dreamings of an April dawn,
Whose radiant tresses are a mountain lawn
Veiled with the gossamers of faery dew,
Whose throat outshines the swan,
And whose soft bosom is a damask bed
For love to lay his head,
Turn, turn to me, obedient to the blood
Of ancient passion pulsing in thy veins,
Yield all the beauty of thy womanhood
To the fierce husbandry of my desire
For golden are the gains
Of our brave passage through that primal fire.
Through our warm wedded strivings we who die
Shall win a bright-eyed immortality
And warrant through this congress of our prime
That when the sponge of Time
Blots out the fleeting record of our days,
A living echo of our silent voice
May carry on the anthem of life's praise.
Come, help me weld this link in nature's claim
To join the generations by our choice!
Else it will be our dust's slow-fading shame
That we let fall the torch that life employs.

Sweet curly-headed elves of innocence,
Flesh of my flesh and sinew of my own,
The happy prattle of your baby days
Rises in worship of those powers immense
That sit in silence on a timeless throne
And grope through nature, shaping all our ways.
Through you my body lives;
Through you my ever-questing spirit gives
Its hopes and strivings to the days to be.
You are not mine alone: by blood's decree
A shadowy sequence of ten thousand sires
Pleads for survival through your little loins;
Their loves, their deep desires,
Their deeds of faith, their trances mystical,
Their flamelike zeal of intellect, yea, all
That legacy of vanished years enjoins
On you the duty of repeated birth
That these dread talents may not rot in earth.
Nor is mere brute begetting your design,
No bestial rut of swine;
For you and all your heirs are consecrate
To the high purposes your fathers dreamed.
Let them not find in you ignoble fate!
For it were base if pure blood were blasphemed
Or soiled the essence you perpetuate.

What if the fleeting centuries shall slay
All issue that might flourish from my seed,
And all the treasured triumphs of my breed
Lie in the dank futility of clay?
Yes, what if eons gulp the Life-flood down,
And with its high renown
The race of man shall perish utterly,
Yielding to dying skies his failing breath,
While cold around his every hope shall be
The slimy polyp tentacles of death?

Shall we recoil in anguish? Nay, not so!
Life's high adventure is its own reward.
Striving against dead earth-stuff's downward flow
Our fearless souls have taken wings and soared;
In wastes where no worth was, we have made Beauty,
Have fashioned Faith and Duty,
And at fair shrines of Honour have adored;
We have proclaimed the mastery of Mind;
Have plumbed the abyss of firmament and sea;
We have upreared the nations of mankind,
Tending the state's red flower of Liberty;
And as the consummation of our dream
Have shaped the excelling joy of human Love,
The bond of man with man, and sweet to prove
When in true wedded hearts it reigns supreme.
This is our answer to the coming night!
Life's day of faith defies the approaching doom.
The brief refulgence of our rebel fight
Transcends a blank eternity of gloom.
So let the darkness do its leaden worst;
So let the grave close over all our flesh
In endless rottenness of black decay;
So let extinction close its task accurst
Without false hopes of granting souls afresh
The fictive wonders of a fairer day;
Still we shall glory in life's plenitude!
Still we shall drink the cup, and call it good!

IN PERPETUUM, FRATER . . . .

(In memoriam W. A. K., 1893-1918)

Athwart the sun, the autumn wind goes sighing;
Great grassy hills lie bare and desolate;
Yonder an empty highroad, stark and straight,
Runs northward muddily, where, darkly dying,
Shell-shattered Morgemont Wood stands bleak and torn;
No house remains, no hamlet left to mourn
The sons of earth; grey peace enfolds the spot
Where only wandering winds now weep their staves
Of lamentation, while dead grasses wave
Their drooping heads about this fenced-in plot,
This little line of graves.

Filled with fraternal grief I come, my brother,
Here beyond seas that sunder us from home.
As boys we loved before we learned to roam,
Born of one honored sire and one sweet mother,
And now must say farewell for all the years.
Thou canst not hear my voice nor see my tears;
For thee this wind is mute, and dark this sun;
Yet would I leave the tribute of my breath,
The words of one who also journeyeth
To this still goal, and when his march is done
Must lie, like thee, in death.

Thine was a valiant ending; thou art buried
With these, thy comrades, who, that August dawn,
Tense with expectancy for night withdrawn,
Sprang to assault the foe in legions serried
And warred with flaming thunders of attack.
Fate blotted out thy fortitude, alack!
Four years of war had spared thee but to slay
At this eleventh hour; soon would have come
An end of strife; thy ears knew not joy's drum
Nor the triumphant trumpets of that day.
Thy boyish lips were dumb.

We little knew, my brother, what the curtain
Of unseen futures held for thee and me,
In those far days of simple childish glee
When life was fair and nothing seemed uncertain.
Children, we ranged the hills and raced the breeze,
Or played at redskin through the whispering trees,
Or paddled, barefoot, in the little stream,
Or with small fingers fed each cherished pet,
And fell asleep at evening but to dream
Of new adventures. Even yet they gleam
Too perfect to forget.

The years brought new delight and new affection,
With swimming, boating, hunting in the wild;
And still the elder brother gladly smiled
When I besought thy teaching or protection.
Often our parents' pride rejoiced to trace
Maturing beauty in thy manly face
And ardent eloquence upon thy tongue;
Often we laughed at all the quips thou cast,
And shared with thee, in ardor to the last,
The songs by sister played, by brothers sung,
In the unreturning Past.

Then duty called thee forth; and love of daring
Cast lore of law aside and seized the sword.
Shameful it seemed to thy warm heart to hoard
The gold of youth when dangers were declaring
Their clamant challenge in the blood-red east.
And yet thou didst not go as to a feast
Of joyful jousting and deep-relished war:
Thine eye could read its horror and its hate,
Yet shrank not from the uttermost of fate
If by thy doom the curse would come no more
To spoil mankind's estate.

IN PERPETUUM, FRATER . . . .

Thus didst thou pay the price, and pass the portal
Of man's Valhalla in the vast unknown;
Nor can our loving verse or sculptured stone
Do more to make thy memory immortal.
Here hast thou left a legacy of trust:
Thou and thy fellows in the silent dust
Will silently reprove us if we fail
To consecrate the prayers your anguish cried
For peace on earth; no other boons abide;
And boasts of victory will but avail
To mock the deaths you died.

And now, farewell, my brother, though my going
To thee is as this wind that walks the hill,
And all my words and weeping wake no thrill
Within thy heart, that has nor sense nor knowing.
We who are left will slowly wither out
To tottering senescence and a drought
Of youthful dreams, though touched to wistfulness
By memories of old springtimes and thy face.
But thee, years may not mar thee nor disgrace,
Lying in timeless youth, unstirred by stress,
Eternal in thy place.

RELIGION

The long-haired pines stood dark about the lawn
Where once I played, a child; their whispers broke
The dreaming silence of a summer dawn
That held the house; at evening still they spoke,
Yet did not drown the music of the pond
Where trilling frogs in ecstasy awoke
And fluted to the night; from slopes beyond
Arose the summons of the whip-poor-will,
Wistful and rare; and that bright vagabond,
The spendthrift moon, cast over grove and hill
Broad handfuls of pure silver and delight.
Then to my boyhood heart there came a thrill
Of thronging wonder for transfigured night:
I felt that earth was sacred, life divine;
A living presence dwelt in depth and height;
Forest and field and family were a shrine,
A sanctified abode of holy peace,
And in its mystery a share was mine.
Nor did the magic of that moment cease
And pass forever like a pale-eyed dream—
The mood returned again when day's decease
Once sighed through autumn woodlands, and a gleam
Of sullen scarlet tinged the tattered shroud
That hung in wan dismay o'er wold and stream;
It came again one morning when I bowed
In golden summer by the Eastern sea,
Sheer sapphire to a sky without a cloud;
And often as I mused in privacy
On pages of old books, some sudden word
Would melt my study's walls and set me free
To roam the stars and ages like a bird;
For life grew rapt; mine and that poet-soul
Rang to the over-tones of music heard
Above the tiny range of time's control;
Nor can my heart forget the solemn sense
Of pulsing humbly in a vaster whole

RELIGION

As I lay still one night, in mute suspense,
And marked my children's breathing, measuring out
The ebbing darkness; then in reverence
I knew that they and I, without a doubt,
Cloaked powers past our knowing, strong and strange
And holy in their might. Thus stirred, devout,
My spirit from its youth makes wide its range
In hours of vision, falling back, it seems,
Yet nerving still its pinions, change on change,
For ever higher flights and higher dreams.
Yet do I know that all this mystery,
This sacramental glory that redeems,
Is not the end of action, though it be
To touch the garment of the Absolute
And feel its virtue heal infirmity.
Our task is work, not worship; and its fruit
No mystic grapes of solitary joy
But toil-won grain to nourish man and brute;
We walk an upward highway; we employ
Our growing strength, that grows by effort still,
In ever climbing, though to man and boy
Vistas of vale and summit sometimes thrill
The gaze with comprehension of the height
And all the path we travel; but 'twere ill
To loiter in such gazing ere the night
Shall mask the dusty road we strive to tread
And close the traveller's hours of failing light
With silent dusk above his silent head.

BLOOD

Beside a cornfield in an ancient land
Men hacked a human throat with knives of flint
And caught the blood in bowls. Its ruddy tint
Splashed hot upon the sacrificial hand,
And salty reek arose, while, eyes asquint,
The body fell convulsive on the sand.
No wanton cruelty inspired the deed;
The tribesmen wished for grain; the fields were bare;
And in the pious anguish of their need
They gave the deities of earth a share
Of human life that life might come again.
Hence came this rite of pain,
This red outpouring from the veins of man
To sate the cruel spirits of the earth.
Out of their narrow minds emerged this birth
Of holy murder by the hungry clan.
Then the pale corpse was laid beside the field
With phallic shafts of stone
That likewise begged the gods of life to yield
A greater largesse from the kernels sown,
Because that power lay with them alone.

So, too, rude Semite shepherds slew each spring
The tender firstlings of their flock and smeared
The blood upon the tent-flaps lest there cling
Some danger from the spirits they revered,
The sanguinary gods of herd and heath
Whose presence in the dim depths underneath
Demanded blood to sate their horrid throats
Before they gave their blessing to mankind.
No human arteries were gashed to find
That bloody draught; but hapless sheep and goats
Were slain to make the offering assigned.

Slow, slow was man to outgrow the gods of blood.
Mosaic cultus sanctified the gore
Of butchered beast and bird, and more and more
Men claimed their sins were cancelled by a flood
Of turbid vein-drip, at a shambles-shrine.
Hosea raised his voice against a world
That so misused the character divine;
Isaiah's curse was hurled
Against the blind and heartless Jews that sought
Their righteousness in blood; and Micah taught
That God had set the sacrifice at naught.
But centuries annulled the vision of that day
And let the priests confirm their savage rite,
Until at last God's all-fulfilling might
Brought forth a Man who walked a humble way
Of suffering and sorrowing and toil;
Who taught that God was gracious; probed the heart
For all the issues that defile and soil;
Displayed in flesh the Father's counterpart;
And as a crowning mercy died to prove
The majesty and deathlessness of love.

But still the ancient blood-gods stand between
With slavering lips and appetites obscene;
The Pharisee of Tarsus sees that Death
Through blood-shot orbits of Rabbinic lore;
The Ephesian elder, steeped in Philo's store
And Ezra's manual, adds his fluent breath;
And following these a zealot host ordains
The metaphysic folly of a creed
That shuts its eyes to Light and still bestains
Christ's radiant revelation as a deed
That slaked our God's blood-hunger. What disgrace
That idols of the tribe must still conspire
With idols of the cave and market-place
To touch the mind with murk and muddy ire

Against the message of a human life
That lived a life divine! Then exorcise,
O God of Christ, these phantoms that arise
From out our savage past to plead for strife!
Banish the gospel of the grisly knife,
And wipe away all murder from our eyes!

THE WOUNDED DOG

(On reading Canon Streeter's *Reality*)

The writhings of his anguish haunt me still,
That wounded dog I found long years ago;
The crazed eye, slavering mouth, and moanings shrill
Proclaimed his fierce extremity of woe.

And shall this unctuous cleric have me hold
That these bespoke no suffering in the brain?
That in this best of worlds the manifold
Dumb sufferers have no consciousness of pain?

Must I believe that nature is a quack,
Who works legerdemain of unfelt smart?
That man alone is sentenced to the rack—
And through it gains the chastening of his heart?

The moans of stricken sentience, bird and beast,
Rise like a strangling mist by night and day;
Earth, air, and sea, north, south, and west and east,
Are tense with torture and convulsed dismay.

The voice of suff'ring clamors at my ear,
The face of torment pleads with me to see.—
I cannot choke my sympathies, I fear,
To justify a sleek theodicy!

LINES NEAR GIZEH, A.D. 1921

The morning sun beats warm upon the sands
That spread, a yellowing ocean, to the west;
In gaunt decay along their borders stands
A line of giant tombs that here attest
This planet's most majestic place of rest:
The mighty mounds that Memphian monarchs raised
South towards Sakkara on the desert's crest
In cyclopean majesty that has amazed
A myriad beholders, nor is yet unpraised.

A hundred thousand hands upreared the stone
In these memorials mounting to the sky;
But sixty human centuries have flown
Above their soaring summits; yonder lie
The mouldering causeways that could once supply
These atlantean ashlars; past all rust
Have vanished mawl and chisel, plumb and pry;
Only these monuments their peaks upthrust
While those that wrought so well are rendered into dust.

A modern avenue, with lebbeks lined,
Leads to the city of ascendant Mars;
Across the ancient stillness harshly grind
The sullen wheels of sand-worn tramway-cars;
Far off, above a din that faintly jars,
There soar aloft a thousand shafts of white
In pure, aspiring perpendiculars
That lift the Muslim spirit toward the bright
High heaven of Allah and his paradise of light.

These things are new; but eastward, as of old,
The gleaming Nile flows on in solemn flood;
The steep Mokattam shines, a cliff of gold,
And Gebel Ahmar is a hill of blood;
On shaded mounds, across the delta mud,
The fellah's hamlets swarm like hives of ants;

The ibis haunts the bars; all this has stood
Untouched by time through all the ceaseless dance
Of days and years and sundering circumstance.

Pensive, like me, Callimachus once walked
About these sands and pondered on the past,
Weeping awhile because no more he talked
With Heraclitus; here beside these vast
Memorials stood Herodotus and cast
A wondering eye upon their soaring sides,
And listened, as I do, from first to last,
To all the glib palaver of his guides,
Who mouthed a thousand myths, with modern lies besides.

Fair women lingered here: Zenobia came,
A conquering queen, to gaze for one brief day;
The exquisite Hypatia did the same
Before mad Cyril's monks arose to slay;
And passioned Cleopatra walked this way
One golden evening in those far-off years
And told her Antony their love would stay
As timeless as this tomb, that still uprears
Its passionless rebuke to human vows and tears.

The masters of the world have known this spot.
Here Bonaparte first fledged his eagle wings;
Here Selim stood, who left the land to rot,
And Saladin, who smote Crusading kings;
The Caliph Omar came; and yet there clings
A gash in the foundations whence men stole
Vast marble booty in their ravagings,
Yet hardly seemed to mar the mighty whole
By all the demolition of that wanton toll.

The godlike Julius trod this quiet place;
Young, ardent Alexander bowed his head

Amid this silence; and Cambyses' face
Grew graver in this garden of the dead;
Stern Assurbanipal calm tribute said,
With Esarhaddon, to the royal ghosts;
And Rameses and Thothmes fought and bled
That all the pride of their imperial hosts
Might match their ancient fathers and these matchless boasts.

What sights, if you could speak, O mounds of death,
Could you recount of days when thus increased
The proud arrays of men whose fleeting breath
Has chilled to mute inanity and ceased!
But in that list of days, one far from least
Was that, I think, when, wandering exil'd,
A tired man led here a tired beast
Bearing a Mother, with a little Child
Who gazed upon your haughty majesty, and smiled.

TO SLEEP

Men call thee twin-born brother of dark Death,
O shadowy Sleep, whose bat-winged messengers
Flit through the twilight to retard the breath
And close the casements of the eye that blurs
With heaviness and sorrow; thus they say,
For day's bright features at thy leaden kiss
Grow speechless as a dial in the dark,
Limbs lie as still as corpses sheathed in ice
Or sealed in rock forever, and the play
Of dancing pulses pauses at thy grey
Cold touch that calms life's agitated spark.

Their witness lies. Thou hast no kindred share
In the black foulness of Death's landlocked pool.
Those whom the ebbing tides of slumber bear
Pass to a murmuring of waters, cool
And drowsy with all healing for the brain,
That, thirsting from the labours of the noon,
Drinks in the sweet oblivion of thy wave;
While senses, long enamored of the boon,
Bathe in the opiate ripples of thy main,
Laving in pure mandragora the pain
That erst the waking hours so harshly gave.

Thou wert our primal and familiar state.
Kin to the silent plant, the seed of man
(Cradled amid the pulses that create)
Fulfils its slumb'ring ante-natal span;
The infant grows by sleep; and though we win
A widening province from thy dim control,
And pride of consciousness proclaims its strength,
Yet is each night a hostage from the soul;
Mind rules by sufferance, thy guards begin
With age to sap its powers from within
And sway once more thy mute domain at length.

TO SLEEP

Thou hast revealed, O Sleep, the brain's abyss,
And that blind monster in the depths below,
The Self we little sense or quite dismiss,
Thrusting from out his caves, to probe and know,
The grey antennae of the eye and ear
And memory and reason; deep he lies,
Unsleeping, never wearied, never spent,
The essence of our being till it dies,
Lurking beneath our life, an engineer
Who guides our action with control austere
Yet wanton in its blind arbitrament.

And when, O Sleep, thou dost his scouts recall,
He riots in his subterranean deeps,
And fears and passions hold high carnival,
Looting the treasury that mem'ry keeps
And mocking loud at reason, drugged and dull.
But when these sentinels escape at last
To walk the ways of consciousness and light,
Perchance some phantom fancy from that vast
Dim depth may tiptoe whispering at their side,
Or taint the draught that daylight springs provide
With poison from the vials of the night.

But though within thy arms our inmost life
Throbs sleepless on, while thought and sense are still'd,
Yet thou some day to Death, as nurse to wife,
Shalt yield this soul, its little term fulfilled.
We shall not wail or struggle, sob or sigh,
Then when she takes us to her ashen breast.
Our hearts have had their day; 'twere weak to weep
In entering on the nescience of our rest.
But ere we turn in pulseless peace to lie,
We yet shall murmur, for the nights gone by,
Our tired thanks to thee, terrestrial Sleep.

LABOR SALVATOR

Mid the perils of this peace,
Mid the fungous growth of gold,
Mid an age that seeks surcease
Of the hardships that uphold,
Grant us Lord, the curse to foil,
Life's best legacy of toil.

Once we prayed that time would bring
Fats to eat and sweets to drink,
Harvest without harrowing,
Rest unracked by pain to think.
Now invention mocks our prayer,
Granting all, to our despair.

Free-born larvae of the deep,
Swimming bright-eyed, swift for food,
Lie at last in loathsome sleep,
Bags of eggs and bags of blood;
Losing all the meed of growth
In the foul decay of sloth.

Forms that once were full of grace
Grovel as they cease to strive,
Failing from their nobler race,
Learning vilely to survive;
Bowel-worm and liver-fluke
Writhe stagnation's base rebuke.

Borne in charioted ease,
Human bodies grow effete;
Sunk in soft prosperities
Fervent spirits lose their heat.
Happier he who tries in vain
Heights no travail can attain.

Grant us then no facile fame;
Give us, Lord, no idle dower;
Rather set our hearts aflame
For the challenge of an hour
When rude dangers bid us rise
Through the press of high emprise.

Science calls from sea and hill;
Love begs battle with disease;
Earth's hard tillage beckons still;
There are godlike claims in these.
Fairest fate of fray we find
In the vanguard march of mind.

Last as first we ask for toil
In the ardent aims of youth,
In the tasks of town or soil,
In the quests of love and truth.
We would scorn all easy goals—
Give our lives and gain our souls.

THE BACILLUS

Low in the marshy miasmas of life's creation
Thou wert engendered in ages incredibly far,
Formed but for feeding and endless multiplication,
Avid to feast at the cost of all things that are.

Carrion glutted the edge of thy primal hunger,
Rendering blindly life's dust to the dust again;
Cleansing the ground and the grave when the earth was younger,
Purging away the pollution of field and fen.

Ah, but this task was soon left to thy peaceful brothers.
Tasting the dying, thy appetite sought the strong,
Growing in cannibal lust for the lives of others,
Vicious in vampire carousing the whole day long.

Lizards titanic, the lordliest breed of ages,
Dragons that dredged through the tropical sloughs of slime,
Faded like dreams at the touch of thy tainted rages,
Vanished away without hope from the fields of Time.

Man came at last as an heir to that saurian lordship,
Rose to a vision of virtue and holy trust;
Little he dreamt of the threat to his gifted wardship
Lurking unseen in the foul and infected dust.

Lathe biosas—In secret thy myriads flourished,
Dragging the saint and the sinner alike to death,
Feeding unknown on the life that their bodies nourished—
Nothing to thee were the prayers of their anguished breath.

Glibly man talked of the earth as a garden of graces,
Sullying maladies stifled his sanguine throat;
Sweetly man spoke of a Good that controlled the Spaces,
Vilely thy hosts slew his visions of things remote.

THE BACILLUS

Cities were sacked by the scourge of thy silent rancour;
Athens was ravaged of old, and London died;
All of the ends of the earth knew pox and canker,
Fell at thy festering onslaughts, terrified.

Slime of the slum-bed and slaver of slattern alleys
Oozed with the feculent filth of thy fevered ways—
Deep in the tenement shadows, the fetid valleys
Where poverty cowered, unhealed by the sunlit days.

But sages arose who could track thee to earth at last,
Probing the infinite little with lens and light;
Found thee and knew thee as foe of the deadly past,
Sought with the acids of anger thy hordes to smite.

Boldly they battle to-day to repulse thy terror,
Drive from our cup and our platter thy hidden curse,
Draining the mind of its treacherous pools of error,
Arming the blood to repel all thy ills perverse.

Thou art a challenge to all that we hope and treasure;
Thou wouldst corrupt all life to a vast, vile yeast;
Thou art a foe to be fought without pause or measure—
Fought to the last fell phase of thy fierce, foul feast!

UN HIJO DE TORQUEMADA

A LEAN ascetic face of livid hue,
A nose that twitched in contumelious sneering,
A staring eye, stark blood-shot to the blue,
A glance soul-searing—

Such was this *canis Domini,* the breed
Of faith's fierce blood-hounds, tracking down dark treason
Against old dogma, or defending creed
And rending reason.

A narrow childhood made his narrow mind
A sunless dungeon, strewn with rack and fetter.
When he invoked God's vengeance on mankind,
He knew no better.

Amid the lurid shadows of that cell
The claims of life sank down like sputtering torches;
He deemed all argument a spark from hell
That scalds and scorches.

All values wavered in that murky brain;
He saw himself grown vaster than all thinking,
One called of God; while those who showed disdain
Were vermin slinking.

Men tried to bring the sunlight of new thought
With anxious ardor through his Bastille-casement;
He damned them all as infidels who sought
His soul's abasement.

Out from the midden of that mental pit
Went poisoned mists that mounted up toward heaven,
And spread abroad to brood in bread of wit
Like devil's leaven.

Thus scattered foul infection of debate,
A curse to countless lives, once sweet and humble,
Giving them fevered shibboleths of hate
To mouth and mumble.

They sundered friend from friend, and son from sire;
Some thought the man a fiend, some swore him sainted;
His tongue was cruel as consuming fire,
His teeth were tainted.

I saw him once when age had made him mild
And rendered feebly impotent his raging malice.
'Twas hard to think this dotard had defiled
The church's chalice.

But all the pathos of that hoary head
Grew ineffectual as I lamented
How much black hate and heartbreak had been spread
By one demented!

THE DISILLUSIONED

She knows his worthlessness at last;
She reads his falseness through and through;
All pride is spent; all hope is past;
All love's illusions proved untrue.

And yet she cannot cast him off—
Some unseen fetter holds her tight
To bear the day's unfeeling scoff,
The crass embraces of the night.

For all the tendrils of her heart
Are ivy to an elm-tree wed
That cannot seek a life apart
And clings although its prop be dead.

A wormwood change is in his charms;
She loathes his heavy, wine-sweet breath;
But though she stifles in his arms,
Her heart and flesh are his till death.

THE FRONTIER WIDOW

A FALLING hemlock robbed her of the man
Who guarded this small cabin from black need;
Ten months have watched maternal anguish plan,
Against all hope, four childish mouths to feed.

The little clearing's harvest is soon spent;
The little larder daily grows more bare;
The loggers of that wintry settlement,
Though kind, have little charity to spare.

And every night she dreams a ghastly dream:
A monstrous spider waits above her head,
And slowly sinking, careless of her scream,
Begins to weave his net across her bed.

His tangling threads are laid upon her lips;
Their skein is woven tight above her breast;
They bind her by the shoulders, ankles, hips;
She struggles, but the bonds are closer pressed.

Until at length the foul thing holds her fast
And sprawls, obscene and sated, on her flesh;
Each morn she prays this horror cannot last,
Each night it drains her heart's best blood afresh.

She eyes her starving children with a groan;
The days will soon decide her soul's debate;
For what can help this woman, left alone,
A fluttering victim in the web of fate!

ON A DUTCH PAINTING

Her dull white hair was tightly gathered back
On her grim head;
She let her dark tongue flicker to attack
In all she said.

The wasting years had withered throat and cheek
And flabby breast;
Her reptile eye forbade the young to speak
A fluttering jest.

She wore the semblance of her native field,
A chapel-sect;
And still beneath a pious suit concealed
A heart infect.

From prattling youth she had been fiercely taught
That sex was foul;
She learned that in love's instincts there was naught
But fiends a-prowl.

The beauty of the body was a snare
From deepest hell,
A lure that doomed our parents to despair
When Adam fell.

She came at last beneath the marriage-quilt,
Yet still believed
All her sweet children were a pledge of guilt
In sin conceived.

Till curdling years had altered her so far
Through poisons pent
That all her vip'rous veins were vinegar
And venom blent.

ON A DUTCH PAINTING

She saw her children's natures bud and flower
In manhood's guise,
And writhed to see the glory of love's power
Within their eyes.

Grace, honour, tenderness, sweet passion's gain
Her soul knew not;
All life was rank and filthy with the stain
Of one black blot.

And so with white hair tightly gathered back
On her grim head,
She let her dark tongue flicker to attack
In all she said.

LEANDER

Far beyond Lemnos and the Chersonese
The sun has sunk below the western verge,
Leaving our world in darkness. Sputtering lamps
Have served to light Abydos to its couch
And are extinguished; while across the stream
Sestos lies dark and slumbering 'neath the stars.

You will be sleeping now; your hair unbound
In fragrant brown confusion; eyelids closed
Above twin pools of blue; one naked arm
Flung back above your head throws open wide
Your night attire and bares the rise and fall
Of your soft bosom, flushed like brow and throat
With the warm pink of slumber; o'er your form
The snowy Carian coverlet reveals,
While half concealing, all the charm and grace
Of Sestos' fairest creature, gently laid
Like lilies drooped in sleep at eventide.

Hero, I come! This strip of streaming sea
Cannot avail to keep our loves apart!
Absence is barren. My impatient soul
Has often leapt across the hateful void
Like summer lightning; now at last I strip
My cloak and tunic off, and plunging in
Fight through the swirling waters to your side.

I know I shall not come in vain; for you
Will start up at my tap upon the door
And rush to let me in. The dripping brine
Upon my limbs will cause you no dismay;
Into the fragrant softness of your breast
Your panting lover will be folded fast,
To mingle tender laughter and warm love
In drowsy Sestos till the break of dawn.

BASIL BULGAROKTONOS

NOTE: In 1014, the Christian tsar of Bulgaria was defeated at Belasitza by the Christian emperor of Byzantium, Basil II, who put out the eyes of 15,000 prisoners taken in the fight and sent them into the camp of his adversary. Hence his proud title "Basil the Bulgar-killer".

OPEN the casement! So! A dying eye
Covets the sunset over Marmora.
I loved it when a boy, and now perhaps
No more shall watch those western fires fade
In waning ecstasies of blood and snow,
Whose shadows crawl across the Asian hills
And deepen in this chamber, and my brain.
What are those ships? Ah, yes, the galleys sent
From Ephesus to join my crescent fleet
That hides the water of the Golden Horn.
At such a time as this I should not die!
God! What a fair armada 'gainst the Saracens!
I have them thwarted in Armenia;
My forts across the Taurus stand like rock;
And now I should have crushed the coping-stone
Of their Sicilian power. It would have crowned
My life-long warfare with a deathless fame.
Cruel, that this curst body plays me false!
Who's this? The bishop come to take my shrift
And to confirm me? Well! For so I trust
Befits the passing of an emperor.
Bring lamps, Demetrius! Darkness comes too soon,
And I am loath to make an end of light.
Welcome, good father! Here you see the death
Of Basil, son of Romanos. Here lies
Your greatest ruler since Justinian
Finished the statutes and the stadium
And spread the town with reckless palaces.
The greater blockhead he! The Code was good,
But who would waste the revenues of state
On fancy stones and mortar, busts of bronze,
Mosaic at a fool's price, paint-smeared walls,

And all the trash of art? I have not bled
The citizenry white for such an end.
Nay, I have fostered up our common folk
And have but marred the swollen revenues
Of our proud millionaires in Mysia. . . . .
What's to confess? Sure, I can think of nought.
Is not my record clear for all to see?
By this grey beard, no one has labored more
To put Byzantium beyond all threat
Of home or alien evil. Phocas fell,
Armenia was won, and, best of all,
I braved the peril of the Bulgar hordes
And broke them utterly. Eleven years,
Years of unchallenged peace recall the day
We faced Tsar Samuel beneath the slopes
Of gaunt, grey Belasitza in the west.
O, we were pressed at first, but not for long.
My legions knew their work, and stood like cliffs
On which the chaotic surges beat in vain.
Then the barbarians wavered, and we struck at last;
They broke; and still we followed, sword in hand.
Then from that rabble on the Struma's banks
We captured fifteen thousand ere the night.
Small use they were to us to keep or feed.
To kill the dogs seemed best. But came a thought
That augured me a genius. Victory
Was not enough; I must so daunt the tsar
That war would never raise its head again.
I dealt those Bulgar rogues in companies
Of even hundreds to my regulars,
And there about our camp-fires all that night
We burnt their staring eyes out one by one.
The air was sick with groanings as our spears
Hissed in each eyeball's crackling cicatrice.
It was a strong man's jest. Then at the dawn,
We turned them loose to go to Samuel,

Leaving a Cyclops to each century,
A one-eyed ghost to every hundred blind,
To guide the vermin back. What, my good sir!
One should have bowels of mercy? Nay, not so,
But rather bowels of brass against such swine.
One of my generals snivelled even then
That I should seek to win them to myself,
To blend their foreign vigor with our blood
And keep in health the stock beneath my rule;
But I have little use for alien folk.
What can the Bulgar or the Servian give
To us so far above them every way?
Those dirty Nordic curs that Narses slew—
What hope had they of culture? One good Greek
Is worth a thousand Goths or Longobards.
Why should we now pollute our father's land
With blue-eyed devils from the Saxon north
Or Slavs and Ugrians from God knows where?
No patriotic Greek who knows the past,
Who treasures our great legacy of fame,
Would ever tolerate these vagabonds
Within our Christian borders. What was that?
They too are Christians! Then, by Gabriel,
My battle-charger is a pietist
As holy as Saint Simeon himself!
You are most wrong to treat these hounds as men.
I knew a bishop in Illyria once,
In that full-blooded province of the West,
Who held that all these Saxons, Franks and Slavs,
Like Welshmen on their ragged heathen hills,
Were something less than human, and that Christ
Wished no such garbage on his golden streets,
Nor in a Christian empire such as ours.
That was a cleric after my own heart;
Yet when he stirred up bands of violent youths
(A secret clan tumultous with zeal)

To riot forth at midnight in disguise
And kill Croatians in the name of God,
I had to stop him; for indeed I found
They masked foul blackguards that assailed the state.
Pogroms against the alien soon became
Nocturnal onslaughts upon loyal Greeks,
And anarchy impended for a time.
That's not the way to cleanse Hellenic blood.
It is a mission for the emperor
To warrant in the name of government. . . . .
Murder, maybe, but with the seal of law.
Ah, I am loath to die! There's much to do.
My hand is needed on the helm of state.
But yonder lights grow pale, and I must go.
Bring here the elements for me, good sir.
Your patriot ruler rises now to God
And all the glories of his just reward.

AFTER FEVER

What, then, is life?—
A fretful child that still would scold and weep,
And must be played with, humour'd, till there creep
Across his eyes oblivion of strife
And dreamless sleep.

PRAIRIE SUMMER

Flutter of leaves in the prairie copse,
Ripple of ripening grasses tall,
But in my heart, whose pulse half stops,
No stir at all.

Singing of winds in the sedges lush,
Laughter of birds in the blue o'erhead,
But in my heart a funeral hush
Where hope lies dead.

Day on the flaming leagues of grain,
Day in the heavens aflood with light,
But in my darkened heart and brain
A deepening night.

SEA SONNETS

I.

I WAIT becalmed upon a torrid sea
Under the fulgor of a flaming sun
That withers hope and leaves the heart undone,
Scorched by its luminous immensity.
The waters lie unrippled and profound,
Still without tremor, viscous, stagnant, dead;
No undulation stirs that pall of lead;
Upon the heavy air vibrates no sound.
One after one the hot and clammy days
Fall dully past, as into an abyss
That yawns forever, while in bloody haze
At nightfall feathered shadows slowly wheel
And gibber, as I scan a sky amiss
And ponder what the future may reveal.

II.

Perhaps some lurid day swift winds may sweep
Me helpless on into a darkened hell
Of rushing waters, menaced by the fell
Typhonic fury of the maddened deep;
In some black, secret chamber of the seas
I may be stifled in the streaming seethe
Of hurricane-lashed surf, buried beneath
The shock and smother of eternities;
Yet through the awful uproar of the storm,
The fiendish blackness and the ghostly gleam
Of crashing billows, no forlorn alarm
Could shake my trust in fairer things to be;
No wild catastrophe could drown my dream
Of halcyon days of perfect sympathy.

III.

Surely my ship shall yet sail jocund on
With the soft laughter of a summer sea
Lisping beneath its bowsprit happily,
And freshening breezes like a benison
Cool and caressing on my burning brow
And through my tangled hair. Across the deep
Blue sky, soft cloudlings like a flock of sheep
Shall wander onward in procession slow.
The calm's despondency shall be forgot,
Forgotten, too, the menace of the storm,
In this fair consummation of a lot
Long hoped and prayed for through the weary past
And now in glad enchantment multiform
Granted my steadfast waiting soul at last.

HEIGHTS AND DEPTHS

Come, stand with me upon a peak of passion,
And let the morning sun of my desire
Touch thy fair lips with light, thy feet with fire,
And flush thy bosom to a fairer fashion!
Broad kingdoms of the earth and all their splendor
Would tempt us not at all in that high hour
As we embraced, obedient to a power
That drew us to the depths of love's surrender.

Then plunge with me into a gulf of glory,
Sink into joy's abyss, descend exulting
To feel its waves and billows surging o'er thee,
Drowning thee down to ecstasies resulting
In deepest life, not death, and there far under
Our blended lives will wake to deathless wonder.

FAITH WITHOUT HOPE

I RAISED the tinted amphora, and lo,
Amid the red wine floated flecks of curd
And yeasty gobbets, pulpous growths that blurred
The ruddy depths that should have sparkled so.
I poured the liquor on the channeled stone
And sniffed the burning reek, yet caught a keen
Cruel stench of evil, nauseous, unclean,
The ashes sputtered as I stood alone.
I leaned against a marble pedestal,
And though a soughing wind, half curse, half kiss,
Oozed from the sanctuary, and the hall
Writhed in the dusk, I watched, calm courage mine,
Unmoved, as one who makes the future his,
The smouldering altar and the wailing shrine.

BOYHOOD

The blue horizon fades far, far away;
Shrill sea-winds falter; purple hills grow dim
In memory; great ships near the ocean's brim
Melt in the magic of a summer's day.
The rocky ramparts soften to a dream,
Pine-darkened; and the laughter of the shore—
Waves lapping, lisping, plashing evermore—
Is fainter than the rippling of a stream.
And so, like summer clouds, the visions fade,
Passing beyond our ken, as all things pass
And are forgotten, till the vows we made
Are silent; dusk comes, for the sun has set;
And rarest hours of happiness, alas,
Are but a yearning and a vague regret.

FORT HENRY REVISITED

October moonlight floods the barren hill
With mellow magic, and the silvery way
Gleams whiter, winding up to walls of grey
Old stone upon the summit, slumb'ring still
As sepulchres by antique tribes designed,
Except for one strayed cricket's elfin tones,
A dog's far howl, and, on the mouldering stones,
Dead grasses whispering to the sighing wind.
Strange shadows form and vanish on the wall;
Wraiths of departed sentries, peering; gaunt
Uneasy captives seeking flight; and all
The restless visions with which fancy teems,
Vague as the wistful memories that haunt
The crumbling ruins of our youthful dreams.

HIGH WINDS

Winds, and far voices wailing, threnodies
Of timeless ages ere man was, make chant
Above the barren sea in accents dominant,
Over the shapeless rocks and naked trees.
Dirges of wild regret for worlds o'erthrown
Sob in shrill anguish down the winter sky.
Aeons rush by me, raising as they fly
A hollow echo from the empty stone.
My flesh is cycles old, my scaly lids
Shroud eyes that feel the pulse of primal time;
The swaddled Pharaohs are ephemerids
Compared with me, whose soul is cased in rime.
For still the winds wail over land and sea
Hoarse lamentations of eternity.

PULVIS ET UMBRA

The dead are dead, and mouldered into dust;
Their breath is lost in lifeless air above;
Lips, hands and breasts that once were warm with love
Are earth in silent earth, where rot and rust
Work their unwitting way on flesh and bone
And funerary casement, dragging down
All elements to dissolution's brown
Cold kinship of Cimmerian sand and stone.

This is the end of all our ecstasy.
Creatures of time, we flutter filmy wings
From birth to nuptial flight, making the sky
At twilight magic with our murmurings;
But sudden silence ends the insect day
And life lies rotting on the Stygian clay.

ARMISTICE DAY, 1929

November winds come back to Marne and Meuse;
They sob beside the Aisne and the Moselle.
Across dun fields once rent with mine and shell
Pale grasses mask the graves. The chilling dews
Of grieving autumn silently accuse
An earth that could unleash those years of hell
In which the slaughtering millions surged and fell
With nameless horrors in their retinues.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, lest we forget
Our duty in this dawn to seek increase
Of all that heals and hallows; so to set
Our faces towards Thy light, that hate shall cease
And all mankind shall hail, with glad eyes wet,
The shining kingdoms of the Prince of Peace!

TRIOLET

I THINK him a fool,
But I smile all the same.
I cannot be cool
Though I think him a fool,
For a smile is my rule.
Yes, I care not who blame!
I think him a fool
But I smile all the same.

MYSTERY

What is a mystery? A safe retreat
When reason seeks, with naked sword-edge cleaving,
To test the dogmas of our sires' conceiving—
The Homoousion, eternal heat,
Elisha's bears, the Eden-myth complete?
Is this thing faith?

A plague on fallacies of self-deceiving,
That, when cold facts condemn, will always bleat
"A mystery!", unconscious of defeat!

Shall we not rather face the cosmic weaving
Of force and will and reason—yea, and greet
With clear-eyed marvelling the strong, yet sweet
Young Nazarene whose life stirs our achieving?
Is not this faith?

SÉANCE

(Icelandic Flow-metre)

Devil-dabblers sit in chambers
Darkened wholly while they hearken
To the trembling tones of converse
Twitching from a haggard witch there.
Omelets, they say, are oozing
Awesome from her ears and nostrils;
Viscid veils of clammy horror
Vilely mask her, shuddering wildly;
And upon this livid putty
Peering faces linger sneering,
Speaking with the voice of spirits
Sped from earth and long since dead now.
In the hot enshrouding shadows,
Shrill palaver, weak and silly,
Rises in these rites of darkness
Rapt in fervent hope to capture
Tale of tender vanished loved ones,
Torn from earth with little warning.

Lurking sprites have played a prologue,
Proven faith with sofas moving;
Tunes have rung with ghostly tapping;
Tables leapt with feet unstable;
Then above his witch the wizard
Wove a spell and darkly drove her
Down to depths of horrid slumber,
Deeper than all human sleeping.
Voices break the voodoo silence,
Vouch themselves the speech of couchant
Presences of spirit prophets
Priests and kings long since deceased, yet
Turning now to teach poor mortals
Tidings from their place of hiding.
Plucked from highest planes of being,

Pliant phantoms, undefiant,
Quietly endure all question,
Queer or plain or wise or jeering.
But their stale and stupid chatter
Stays the mind that hears their raving
With a sober cool decision
So to listen as to know there
Whence these whispers and these babblings
Whelp themselves in ghoulish yelping.
Shelley jests of bobs and shingles—
Shall we not reject his sally?
Sheridan is dull and shoddy—
Should his spirit be so wooden?
Shakespeare talks like Justice Shallow—
Surely he would not be puerile
Were the witness truly given,
Wafted from a true hereafter!

Yet the facts surpass all fancy,
Few who think the truth a duty
Laugh and cavil, unbelieving.
Lips and ears and nostrils dripping
Fungus foul, with astral voices,
Frantic knocks, and tables' antics—
These are current coin of voucher,
Caught by those who long have sought them.
Yet the mind that yearns for meaning
Yokes no clue to what is spoken.
Not to non-existent spirits
Need we trace this interceding;
Nor indeed to fictive devils,
Denizens of hellish fen-lands,
Passing into potent tenure,
Penetrating human entrails.
In the limbo of old laughter
Lie the fiends in endless hiding;

SÉANCE

Spirits after sad sepulture
Sleep in carrion's lifeless keeping;
But the living soul's abysses
Bear their crypts beyond declaring,
Past the deepest plummet's measure
Pits within us, unadmitted,
Open down to ancient caverns,
Old as earth, and still enfolding
Potencies of plasmic forces,
Puissance of astral beauties,
Far surpassing all that fevered
Frenzy may have apprehended.
Gleams of these, in murky glimpses,
Glimmer, it may be, though dimly,
In these hours of eerie converse
O'er the minds that seek their story.
Only let the weak be wary,
Walk with caution, lest some stalking
Day of madness dash them headlong
Down to those black depths confounded!

UNEMPLOYABLE

Crude, rude, crass and vicious,
  Crazed, perhaps, and lazy,
Here, near, he is standing
  Haggard, wan, and ragged.
Scarr'd, hard, scanning darkly,
  Scowling at us foully,
See, he, soured and bitter,
  Seeks to damn our sleekness.
Want, gaunt, wastes him, thinking
  Work was made for shirking:
"Well, hell! Wolfish masters
  Wear a man and tear him!"

Whose—choose!—whence this evil?
  Why this human vileness?
We?—He?—Will one venture
  Weight of blame to state here?
Shame's claim—shall we share it?
  Shoulder failures boldly?
Flung, young, flawed but manlike,
  Flesh on labor's threshold,
Taught naught, tossed aside, when
  Tides of trade are idle—
Dust, rust, dull his spirit,
  Dare not judgment spare him?

AUTUMN

I.

Now autumn falls
On tawny fells
And raw red lies
In dreary dells.

For sumachs burn;
Far smoke is brown;
As foliage dun
Is falling down.

The sun has hid
Thus soon his head;
Suns' life has died
Since love is dead.

II.

Sands are wet,
  Moons are set,
    Moans our sea;

Love once vain
  Across the main
    Cries to me.

Wind and wave
  Weep and rave;
    Woe-pained rove.

All things grieve,
  See grey forms weave
    As grief-rhymes wove.

III.

Clouds of grey are clamant now,
Acclaiming days of sorrow;
Tempests in the treetops high
Are tossing loud their outcry.

Windows wet with winter rain
Bewail the spirit's murrain;
Sodden fields beneath the stress
Of storms lie dark and lifeless.

Terns across the tossing sea
Give tongue to grief and pity;
Veiled in foam the void upflings
A voice of myriad moanings.

KARMA

Though not as Hindus hold in their subtleties,
Still born and re-born, shaping our destinies,
  Outworking fate's slow penal charter,
    Passionless, pitiless, dire and deathless—

Yet dost thou, Karma, move in the lives of men,
Stern moulder, seed-borne, visiting silently
  The sins of sires to curse the children:
    Body and brain and infected fancy.

Says Buddha, soul-stuff cannot have origin
Nor mortal unions make immortality;
  Its essence looks before and after,
    Summons a sequence of endless selfhoods.

Those same just scales might cancel eternity
To each poor soul in prospect and retrospect;
  But life goes on though we may perish,
    Cheating the grave through the grace of children.

Yet babes are bound by fetters of circumstance
For Karma claims its merciless mastery,
  Imposing ordained face and fashion,
    Moulding the nature of man forever.

INTOLERANCE

Hail, thou, king of the kites, prince of the birds of prey!
All hail, tireless fiend, winging from tracts of hell!
Black shades, blacker than night, lurk in thy loathsome plumes;
Red gouts, fresh from our hearts, drip from thy ruthless beak.

Old smoke, odor of ash, lingers about thee yet;
Old chains, fetter and rack, jangle upon thy breast;
Old creeds, slimy and blind, crawl on thy filthy flesh;
Old hates, fetid and foul, reek from thy patriot throat.

Long since, screaming in joy, perched upon Babel's tower,
Thou, fiend, gladdened to know, language would sunder men.
Ah, true! Down through the years, nations have raped and slain.
Race-crazed, millions have died, torn by thy talons grim.

Black-cowled, roosting in wrath, high on cathedral spires,
Long years, thou didst attack, fiercely, the lambs of Thought;
Proud-eyed, preening thy cant, often in chapel sects,
Thou hast, harpy of hate, sullied the sacred feast.

Times change, truth is increased, sunrise of reason dawns;
Still thou, bird of the night, flutterest hostile yet;
High, far, over our fanes, over our college halls,
Dark shades, cast by thy wings, pass and repass above.

Hail, then, vulture of vice, hail, and a curse be thine!
Vile one, Satan of souls, short be thy term of life!
Dark deeds, dogmas of death, these, all thy works, be dead!
Foul fiend, hail and farewell! Pass to thy pit again!

WINTER

Stern and strong, great lord of the Arctic spaces,
Fierce yet fair-faced, ruler of snowy tundras,
I salute thee, hail thee as benefactor,
Kind to my country!

Noble nights, nights lit with the streaming glories
Cast abroad, bright-haired, by the Northern Dawnlight—
These enfold thee, these are thy royal mantle,
Monarch most mighty!

Sultry south-lands, sick with the suns of summer,
Swoon to death, deep-smitten with fenny fevers,
Stung by fly-foes, seized by colossal vipers
Lurking in jungles—

Ah, but here, here Canada's fragrant forests
Breathe out health, breathe peace from the south's infection.
Purged by thee, O Winter, our plains and mountains
Heal us and hold us.

Ay, and more! Thy boisterous moods have made us
Brave and man-souled, eager to wrestle danger,
Laughing loud, exultant amid thy blizzards,
Fronting thy frenzy.

See our youth, hot-hearted, assail thy snow-fields!
See them, steel-shod, tramp on thy frozen torrents!
See them fly, men-eagles, about our Arctic,
Crowning our rights there!

These proclaim thee, Winter, as friend and father,
Thanking thee, great king of the strong and daring.
Thee our land exalts, through the stalwart ages,
Sire of our greatness!

FLAMEN DIALIS

What strange practices, for a cultured people,
Marked the flamens, the Roman priests of fire!
He of Jupiter, highest of the order,
Crowned with conical, woollen cap of office,
Gowned in woollen, a scratchy home-made toga,
Closed with clasps, and a broken ring upon him,
Sought the Capitol, armed with knife and sceptre.
Then no army nor chains might meet his vision,
No crass laborers mar his holy eyesight.
Faith forbade, to his lips, the name of ivy;
Dogs, and goats, and raw meat and beans were censored;
Nor might carrion, man or beast, pollute him;
Never, never, might horses touch his person;
Thus his sanctity was hedged about by custom.

Shall we snicker, we men of modern nations,
When we contemplate this nonsense of the flamen?
Who are we, to deride the force of custom?—
Lo, in summertime, when it's over ninety,
While our womenfolk wear eleven ounces,
We still languish in coat and vest and trousers,
Garments hideous, fashioned by the devil!
Ah, that jacket, with heavy padded shoulders!
Ah, that waistcoat, with all its useless pockets!
Ah, those trousers, with closely guarded creases!
What insanity makes us bear the burden?
Makes us tolerate all this weight of serges
Clinging clammily, hot upon our haunches?
Blind, blind, blind we are, follied beyond measure,
Just as laughable as the ancient Roman.

GHAZAL

The rose and the jasmine are whispering low;
The violet sweet and the lily like snow
Are pleading most tenderly, lass of my heart!
So come to me, dear, while the moonlight lies low
Where myrtles and marjoram gleam in the dusk
And under the arbor the daffodils blow!
All nature implores you: The birds of the night
Are restless and wait for your coming, I know,
For thrushes have sobbed in the gloom of the grove
And nightingales' notes are half rapture, half woe—
Half hope that you hasten, half fear that you stay.
The breath of the night-wind speaks dreamily, slow,
And longs to lie soft on the bed of your breast;
The eyes of the stars view this garden below
With tender entreaty and golden delight;
And earth, our great mother, is darkly aglow,
In joy that her children should yield to that pow'r
That beats in her veins from long ages ago.
Then come, my beloved, make haste to my side!
Come soon in the moonlight, your love-gifts to strow!
Make happy the arms that have begged your embrace,
And solace the warm lips that sigh for you so!

PATERNITY

If I should die, what of the days thereafter?
If I were dust, what of the lads that love me?
As they grew men, would they, amid their laughter,
Remember me? Turn them to weep above me?

Though youth is brief, childhood a dream of playing,
Though now each sports, laughing as time will let him,
Yet would they not, pensive, recall me, saying:
"His love was great. How can his boys forget him?"

But life moves on, bringing new joys and sorrows;
My face would fade, lost in the grey, past keeping;
I'd rest content, knowing that their to-morrows
Must feel my love, even though thought were sleeping.

THE SEARCH

Something precious and most sweet, alas, is lost;
Something holier than all prayer, more deep than grace.
Vainly over the spring fields, through copses moss'd,
Stray I, seeking for the ghost of beauty's face.

Nothing charms me in this glade as once it did;
Dully, hungrily I gaze, yet cannot find
Some enchantment of the eyes that here lies hid,
Vanished wholly over stream, hill, wood and wind.

Was I, all through those old days, a dupe of dreams?
Were, then, beauties beyond thought but passion's lies?
Nay, nay! Visions once were true! It rather seems
Now that nightmares of false death delude my eyes!

METROPOLITAN HOKKU

Shadows lie at noon
Within sheer man-made valleys.
Tides of life flow loud.

A thousand discords
Vibrate down these canyon-walls.
The stunn'd ear sickens.

Viewed from clouds by night,
A shawl of star-points quivers.
Life breathes beneath it.

Flakes of virgin white
Drift along the boulevards;
Feet will soil them soon.

What is this city?
A honeycomb of granite
Time's paw will ravage.

THE ROAD

Morning, and the glamor of the far road gleaming;
Glory of the dawning up the valleys of the east;
Drifts of rosy vapor on the hilltops dreaming;
Rapture of the rider and his warm, brown beast.

Noonday and the ardor of the high sun burning;
Shimmering of fire on a white and dusty way;
Trampling of the hoof-beat at the hot stones spurning;
Foreheads fronting boldly to the fair, fierce day.

Evening and the pallor of the grey road paling—
Paling to the westward down the shadowy valleys deep;
Sigh of drooping rider and of worn horse failing,
Seeking the dim hostelry where spent souls sleep.

APPENDIX ON METRES

Inasmuch as this volume employs several metres wholly new to English and several others only rarely attempted, the following technical note has been added for the benefit of the reader who is interested in prosody:

In *The Tide of Life* and *Blood* is found the Italian "eleven-seven" metre, in irregularly rhymed strophes. Masculine rhymes in English turn this into a "ten-six" metre—a sequence of decasyllabics broken occasionally for effect by hexasyllabics. This measure was much used by Dante and Petrarch in their canzoni and by Leopardi (with much greater use of heptasyllabics) in some of his odes. It was used by Spenser in his *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion,* and by Milton in his *Lycidas;* but otherwise has been comparatively neglected in English.

Religion uses the Italian "terza rima", but with an attempt to avoid, by liberal enjambement, the monotony which usually disqualifies this metre for use in English.

Séance employs the Old Icelandic "flow-metre" (Eight-measured Court Metre), trochaic tetrameter in couplets in which the first stressed syllable of the second line rhymes with the last stressed syllable of the same line and alliterates with any two of the four stressed syllables in the preceding line. While the Icelandic usage normally calls for closed couplets and stanzas, enjambed paragraphs have here been substituted for special effect. In *Unemployable* is another Icelandic mode: "shiver-metre" (*skialf-hent*), said to have been invented by the poet Weili "on a reef where he was shivering cold and naked after a shipwreck". Its basis is a couplet of trochaic trimeters with marked spondaic substitution in the first foot of the first line, internal rhymes, and alliterative coupling.

Autumn is a dubious experiment in Old Welsh metres. The first part is in "cynghanedd groes", which calls for virtually complete consonantal equivalence between the two lines of each couplet. The second part is in "cynghanedd sain", in which the second line of each triplet rhymes with the first line and has consonantal equivalence with the third line. The third part of *Autumn* is in the "cywydd-metre", in which heptasyllabic

couplets rhyme but with the stress accent alternatively on the ultimate and the penultimate syllables. Upon this last metre there has been superimposed the gratuitous ornament of alliteration on Icelandic principles.

The next four poems follow classical Greek and Latin models. *Karma* is in Horatian Alcaics, but occasionally approximates to the freer (trochaic-dactylic) type used by Alcaeus himself. *Intolerance* is based on the First Asclepiad metre, made famous by Horace's *Exegi monumentum aere perennius.* In English, the heavy spondaic opening unfits it for poems of any length. *Winter* is, of course, in Sapphics; and *Flamen Dialis* is in the hendecasyllabic measure of Catullus (first foot spondee, iambus, or trochee; the second a dactyl; and the rest trochees, except that the last syllable is common).

The *Ghazal* is an Arabo-Persian poem-type, consisting of from five to fifteen couplets in any uniform metre. The rhyme is set by the opening line (*matla'*); and with this the *second* line of every couplet must agree. The metre used in this case is a subspecies of Bahri Mutakarib, the commonest of the Arabo-Persian measures.

The next two poems introduce new metres from ancient Sanskrit lyric poetry, both being varieties of the "tristubh" quatrain. *Paternity,* however, uses hendecasyllabic lines of unusual pattern, the Upendravajra-metre, consisting of two iambs, a transitional dactyl, and two trochees; while in *The Search* the line-unit is in the Rathoddhata-metre, a hendecasyllabon which is the exact obverse of the Upendravajra-line, viz.: two trochees, a transitional anapaest, and two iambs. In both cases, rhyme has been added.

In *Metropolitan Hokku* is found the chief verse-form of Japan, consisting of three lines, of five, seven, and five syllables respectively. Each hokku is a tiny unit in itself, seeking to suggest some significant thought rather than to develop it. An attempt has here been made, by the juxtaposition of several hokku on the same general theme, to achieve a cumulative effect.

The Road has simply a metre compounded *ad hoc* from paeons and epitrites, with free substitution and alternating catalexis.

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The tide of life and other poems.

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